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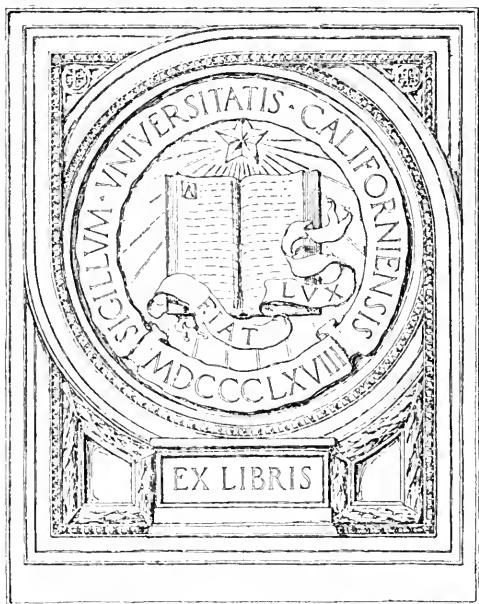
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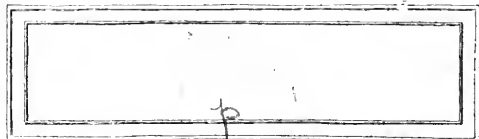


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WARTON LECTURE ON ENGLISH POETRY

IX

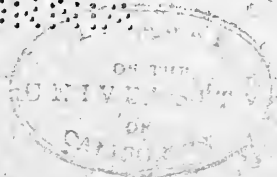
Poetry and Time

By

Sir Henry Newbolt

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IX

POETRY AND TIME

By SIR HENRY NEWBOLT

Read December 11, 1918

AMONG the greatest English poets, some by their poetical work, some by the utterance in prose of their deliberate reflections, have supplied us with materials from which we can construct a definition of Poetry: a definition resting not upon mere authority, but upon a scientific analysis of the facts of human feeling, thought, and expression. This definition might perhaps be set down and annotated in some such words as these:—Poetry is the expression in speech, more or less rhythmical, of the aesthetic activity of the human spirit, the creative activity by which the world is presented to our consciousness. But this is not enough: it gives us only Poetry in the abstract, and makes no distinction between good and bad, greater and lesser poetry. The two necessary further stages are these: good poetry is not merely the expression of our intuitions, it is the masterly expression of rare, complex, and difficult states of consciousness: and great poetry, the poetry which has power to stir many men and stir them deeply, is the expression of our consciousness of this world, tinged with man's universal longing for a world more perfect, nearer to the heart's desire. By definition, and in a plain prosaic way, we are all poets, all makers of our own world: but the great poets re-make it for us—they take this very world of time in which we live, and by an incantation they rebuild it for us, so that for an instant we see it under a light that is not the light of Time.

This definition, it will be seen, covers not only the more ordinary examples of poetical expression, but includes also the utterance of desires more profound and more far-reaching in their significance, and consequently more difficult to submit to any effective analysis.

Longing for all perfection and regret for all imperfection in human life are the chief of these: the two are but different manifestations of the same deep desire, and the second is the more poignant. By the waters of Babylon man sits down and weeps in his secret heart: how shall he sing the Lord's song in a strange land? This regret for the imperfection of human life may be expressed in many ways, ranging from open revolt or indignation to a passionate dejection, redeeming pain by the subtle beauty of the voice which utters it. But among the many notes there is one which is heard again and again with greater frequency, and especially in the work of our own poets, the voice of a country where poetry has constantly vibrated with the deepest music of all. How many of our best have been indeed wanderers and seekers, weather-beaten venturers, exiles conscious of a hope that was but too truly infinite, longing for a return to a home that seemed half a dream and only half a memory.

It would take long to enumerate all the poems in which this sense of exile has been expressed: a few typical examples will suffice. The simplest is perhaps the most familiar:

Father, O Father, what do we here
In this land of unbelief and fear?
The Land of Dreams is better far
Above the light of the morning star.

So sang William Blake in the childlike terror of insight: in a more wistful mood he murmured the faint unconscious moan of 'the lost traveller's dream under the hill'.

Matthew Arnold speaks often to the same purpose: sometimes in the mere suggestion of a metaphor:

And though we wear out life, alas!
Distracted as a homeless wind,
In beating where we must not pass,
In seeking what we shall not find,

Yet we shall one day gain, life past,
Clear prospect o'er our being's whole,
Shall see ourselves and learn at last
Our true affinities of soul.

Sometimes in the plainest of words:

I knew not yet the gauge of time
Nor wore the manacles of space:
I felt it in some other clime,
I saw it in some other place;
'Twas when the heavenly house I trod
And lay upon the breast of God.

This leads us back to Wordsworth's doctrine :

The soul that rises with us, our life's star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar :

but it has not Wordsworth's haunting music :

Hence in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither . . .

and still less the imaginative eloquence of Emily Brontë's *Prisoner*,
the vision of one killed with desire :

Desire for nothing known in my maturer years,
When Joy grew mad with care, at counting future tears :
When if my spirit's sky was full of flashes warm,
I knew not whence they came, from sun or thunderstorm.

But first, a hush of peace—a soundless calm descends :
The struggle of distress and fierce impatience ends :
Mute music soothes my breast—unutter'd harmony
That I could never dream, till Earth was lost to me.

Then dawns the Invisible : the Unseen its truth reveals :
My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels :
Its wings are almost free—its home, its harbour found,
Measuring the gulf, it stoops, and dares the final bound.

This is no new feeling, no mere phase of a modern restlessness : it is
as well known to Crashaw as to Vaughan :

The self-remembering soul sweetly recovers
Her kindred with the stars ; not basely hovers
Below ; but meditates her immortal way
Home to the original source of Light and intellectual Day.

But Vaughan, though less fervent, is even more convinced : in his
curious distinctness of statement emotion is almost forgotten :

Man hath still either toys or care,
He hath no root, nor to one place is tied,
But ever restless and irregular
About the earth doth run and ride.
He knows he hath a home, but scarce knows where :
He says it is so far
That he hath quite forgot how to go there.

In all these passages the thought is unmistakable : the very word
'home' or 'homeless' is spoken in most of them. But there are
many others not less clear, though in them the idea is conveyed
rather by the emotional colouring than by the intellectual outline.

Blake of course is a master in this art : the brooding of years escapes him in a single cry :

Thou . . . didst . . . me to mortal life betray.

Tennyson's 'banisht into mystery and the pain Of this divisible and indivisible world'¹ is an echo to this, and his Ancient Sage has some touch of the same haunted sense :

For oft

On me when boy there came what I then called
In my boy phrase : 'The Passion of the Past'.
The first grey streak of earliest summer dawn,
The last long stripe of waning crimson gloom,
As if the late and early were but one—
A height, a broken grange, a grove, a flower,
Had murmurs 'Lost and gone and lost and gone'.
A breath, a whisper, some divine farewell,
Desolate sweetness, far and far away—
What had he loved, what had he lost, the boy ?

What had he lost ? To that every poet has his own answer. For Wordsworth the loss is the forgetting by the child, as in sleep, of that imperial palace whence he came ; the gradual fading of the clouds of glory which the soul comes trailing with it from its heavenly home. Here again Vaughan has been before him, in thought and almost in word :

O how I long to travel back
And tread again that ancient track !
That I might once more reach that plain
Where first I left my glorious train,
From whence the enlightened spirit sees
That shady City of palm trees.

For Matthew Arnold the loss is a moral loss, the ruin of our best nature, our unity :

We unwillingly return
Back to this meadow of calamity,
This uncongenial place, this human life,
To see if we will poise our life at last,
To see if we will now at last be true
To our own only true, deep buried selves,
Being one with which we are one with the whole world.

For Rossetti it is the oblivion which veils from us our true spiritual kindred, revealed again only in the moment of a doubly intimate love.

¹ *De Profundis*.

Even so, when first I saw you, seemed it, love
 That among souls allied to mine was yet
 One nearer kindred than life hinted of.
 O born with me somewhere that men forget
 And though in years of sight and sound unmet,
 Known for my soul's birth-partner well enough!

For Mr. Yeats it is the loss of peace in the world by the jarring of outward circumstance. In one song he looks to find it again here and now in a lake-island with a magic name: in another he will re-make the visible earth after his own heart:

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great to be told:
 I hunger to build them anew, and sit on a green knoll apart,
 With the earth and the sky and the water remade like a casket of gold
 For my dreams of your image that blossoms, a rose, in the deeps of
 my heart.

But the music which is most his own is deeper and sadder than this:

And gather you
 Who have sought more than is in rain or dew,
 Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,—
 Or sighs amid the wandering starry mirth,—
 Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips,—
 And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
 The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
 To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell:
 God's bell has claimed them by the bitter cry
 Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

Life to this poet is a secret, a mystery revealed only to those who go upon a weary pilgrimage, a hopeless crusade: the sad, the lonely, the insatiable: the exiles far from home, whose quiet waters, even while they stand upon our pavements, they hear in the deep heart's core. Tagore is not so sad, but he too finds in the pain of exile the very principle of human life.

'It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky. . . . It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves and desires, into sufferings and joys in human homes: and this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through my poet's heart.'

So far, in looking at one after another of the delicately woven fabrics of the poets, we have seen two threads recurring more often than the rest: one is the thought of exile, the primary one for which our choice was made; the other is a secondary one, the idea of reminiscence, of an ante-natal existence. In the belief of some at

least of these poets the home which man desires is not merely his by affinity, it is his by former possession, his from the beginning and before it, his from eternity, or at any rate as partaking of an eternal nature originally his own. This belief is of course familiar enough in doctrinal verse, but it is not in its poetic origin Christian: it has come down to us from the ancient world. Not the Roman world: for Horace and his countrymen home was earth, the never too much loved earth, and the exile that all men dread was death, the unwilling departure from woods and house and pleasing wife.

Omnium
Versatur urna serius ocius
Sors exitura, et nos in aeternum
Exsilium impositura cymbae.

The other-worldliness of our poetry has a deeper source: it is an out-flow of the great Platonic watershed. 'Now every human soul', says Plato, 'must have seen the realities of that other world . . . but to recall those things by means of the things of this world is not easy for every soul. Few indeed are left who have a ready and sufficient memory: and they, when they behold here any likeness of the things there, are amazed and cannot contain themselves. But what this emotion really is they know not, because their perception is too indistinct.'

It is impossible not to hear the echo of this in some of the most famous poems in our own language.

Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

And before Shakespeare, Spenser had already sung his Hymn of Heavenly Beautie.

Rapt with the ray of mine own ravisht thought
Through contemplation of these goodly sights,
And glorious images in heaven wrought,
Whose wondrous Beauty, breathing sweet delights
Do kindle Love in high-conceited sprights,
I feine to tell the things that I behold,
But feele my wits to faile and tongue to fold . . .
Vouchsafe . . .
To shed into my breast some sparkling light
Of thine eternall Truth, that I may show
Some little beames to mortall eyes below
Of that immortal Beautie, there with thee,
Which in my weake distraughted mynd I sec.

The poets of our own time have had these visions too. If one may be quoted it shall be Richard Watson Dixon :

Hard is the way and strait the gate,
And life is in a narrow strait.
Once only did my soul aspire
To scale the Orient dropping fire,
Once only floated in the ways
Of heaven, apart from earthly haze :
And then it was a foolish soul
And knew not how the heavens do roll.

And now we may perceive, interwoven with these two threads of exile and of reminiscence, a third and even a fourth line of thought, represented by the twin words Time and Eternity. They will need careful tracing, for the poets have used both of them in several different senses. But trace them we must, for in one way or another they seem invariably to be involved in the contrast between human life and the more perfect existence which is regretted or desired. Time, in the older poets, is taken in the simple and obvious sense, but it is not often simply or directly dealt with. It is generally presented by its effects, as a cause of decay and change, a ruining force, the antithesis of the eternal because it interferes with the durability of things : and it is commonly personified as a being hostile to man, and of the same nature as Death. To attain immortality is to sit 'triumphing over Death and Change, and thee, O Time'. A slight variation is made by Sir John Davies, who represents Death as setting free the soul to survive Time :

Time itself in time shall cease to move :
Only the soul survives and lives for aye . . .
And when thou think'st of her eternity
'Think not that Death against her nature is :
Think it a birth, and when thou goest to die,
Sing like a swan, as if thou wentst to bliss.

But this simple imagery could not continue to satisfy : if we pass on to our own time we shall find repeated attempts to express a more philosophic view. It is perhaps not quite certain what Swinburne meant by the title of his poem *The Triumph of Time* : but I think it may fairly be inferred that he used the word Time in a double sense : first in the old sense as the Depriver, 'Now Time has done with his one sweet word', and secondly as the mark and symbol of things transitory and unworthy, the 'fugitive things not good to treasure' on which the rest of his life must now be spent. If only his love could for one moment have reached fruition, he cries, it would

have attained immortality : and this is the main thought in a poem which might otherwise have been described as the triumph of Sentimentality : a real thought, for it makes Time no longer an external force, but an inherent quality of human life, and that is a long step towards the truth.

Rossetti, though in a fashion entirely his own, supplies a parallel to this advance. His Blessed Damozel is no longer conscious of Time herself : after ten years' absence from earth ' Her seems she scarce had been a day ' in heaven ; but as she looks down from ' the rampart of God's house ',

From the fixed place of Heaven she saw
Time like a pulse shake fierce
Through all the worlds.

Here, too, Time is an inherent quality, almost a physical quality, of life in the worlds created ; a clock-beat audible and even visible, a feverish throbbing which will pass away when the calm of eternity is reached. It may not be the best image available, but it is a very powerful one, and it is, as far as it goes, an image of truth.

A later poet, Rupert Brooke, thought more philosophically of the nature of Time, and made a more deliberate attempt to express his vision of it. He shows us an interior of the most ordinary kind, a scene of laughing friends around a tea-table, himself looking on at their changing faces :

Till suddenly, and otherwhence
I looked upon your innocence,
For lifted clear and still and strange,
From the dark woven flow of change,
Under a vast and starless sky
I saw the immortal moment lie.
One instant I, an instant knew
As God knows all. And it and you,
I, above Time, oh ! blind ! could see
In witless immortality.
I saw the marble cup : the tea
Hang on the air, an amber stream :
I saw the fire's unglittering gleam,
The pointed flame, the frozen smoke.
No more the flooding lamplight broke
On flying eyes and lips and hair ;
But lay, but slept unbroken there
On stiller flesh and body breathless,
And lips and laughter stayed and deathless,
And words on which no silence grew.
Light was more alive than you.

For suddenly and otherwhence
 I looked on your magnificence.
 I saw the stillness and the light,
 And you, august, immortal, white,
 Holy and strange: and every glint,
 Posture and jest and thought and tint,
 Freed from the mask of transiency,
 Triumphant in eternity,
 Immote, immortal.

In this scene what the poet has most obviously done is to fix the appearances of things at a given moment of time, as they are fixed by an instantaneous photograph, or by the re-creative effort of a skilful painter. If he had done no more than this, he would have failed of his aim, for he expressly says that what he is trying to show us is his vision of the immortal moment, of things known as God knows them. If he does not succeed in this, he certainly does not altogether fail: he conveys the impression of something revealed, he gives as marks of the eternal the qualities of holiness and stillness, and he represents Time or transiency as a mask which in life hides the immortal being from us. What that immortal being is he can only express by two means, neither of them entirely convincing: first by the ascription to the essential personality of such qualities as innocence and magnificence, and secondly by a paradoxical statement that in the eternal vision such transient things as glints of light, postures of body, jests and thoughts, and tints of colour, are no longer transient but immote and immortal. The result is that while we readily accept the view of Time as a mask, we remain without a really clear image of the eternal behind it. This is no new difficulty. It is very plainly felt in one of Vaughan's best-known poems, *The World*. This begins in a splendid and daring attempt to picture eternity, and rapidly falls away into commonplace allegories of the life of man in the lower and darker region of the earth.

I saw Eternity the other night,
 Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
 All calm as it was bright,
 And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days, years,
 Driv'n by the spheres,
 Like a vast shadow moved, in which the world
 And all her train were hurl'd.

Fine as this is, it is but an abstract way of summarizing the eternal, while the image of Time as darkness is not nearly so vivid as Rossetti's suggestion of a great pulse beating throughout the universe.

Shelley's thought was often abstract too, and his images of Eternity vague, but in *Adonais* he has given us the best image yet found by a poet for the relation of Time and Eternity.

Life like a dome of many coloured glass
Stains the white radiance of Eternity
Until Death tramples it to fragments. Die
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled.

It is noteworthy that this image of Time as a medium which intercepts and dims our vision of the Eternal is one of three chosen by a living philosopher to suggest his own view of the relation of Time to Eternity. The passage begins:

'We must conceive our perception of things in Time to be an illusion, of the same character as those which make us see the sun at sunset larger than at midday, and make us see a straight stick crooked when it enters the water. I do not, after childhood, suppose the stick to be really crooked. But however clearly I may satisfy myself, either by reasoning or by the sense of touch, that the stick has not changed its shape since it was put in the water, I shall continue to get visual sensations from it resembling those which would be given me by a crooked stick in the air. Of this sort is the illusion of Time—though it is far more general, and far more difficult to grasp. It hides part of the truth, it suggests a wrong judgment . . .'

Shortly afterwards, as though dissatisfied with these two images, he continues as follows:

'At the same time, this appearance is not *mere* illusion. We perceive, in spite of this illusive form of Time, some of the real nature of the Timeless reality. So, if we look through a window of red glass we shall see the objects outside correctly as to their form, size, and motion, though not correctly as to their colour. The question is of course much more complicated here. We cannot get round on the other side of Time, as we can on the other side of the glass, and so discover by direct observation what part of our previous experience was due to the form of Time. And to reach and justify an idea of what the true timeless nature of existence may be is a very hard task, though not, I think, an impossible one. We must content ourselves here with the general result that where existence appears to us under the form of Time, we see it partly but not entirely as it really is.'¹

In these passages of prose, marked by all his own lucid and logical method of exposition, Dr. McTaggart has been almost driven to cross the frontier of poetry. He has at any rate throughout his treatise

¹ *The Relation of Time and Eternity*, by John Ellis McTaggart, The University Press, University of California, 1908.

provided us with invaluable hints for the criticism of existing poems on the subject we are now considering, and has perhaps cleared the way for a future advance by the poets. In the first place he has distinguished between the several uses of the word Eternity or Eternal. To many poets and their readers Eternity means merely everlasting Time—what Tennyson desires in the line, 'Give me the glory of going on and still to be'. This, however common, is neither a philosophical nor a poetical view: it does not admit of that deep sense of exile, that desire for a city of the soul, which is of the essence of poetry and could never be satisfied by any mere perpetuation of this life. Secondly, there is a sense in which Eternity is used to mean such a timelessness as is possessed by all general laws. The truths of mathematics, of reason, of beauty, of the highest moral excellence, are all called eternal because they cannot be imagined by us as changing or passing away in any age or condition of existence. It was of such laws and such an eternity that Sophocles wrote in one of the greatest moments of Greek poetry:

Would that fate would let me wear
Hallowed innocence of words and all deeds, weighing
Well the laws thereof, begot on holier air,
Far on high sublimely stablished, whereof only
Heaven is father: nor did birth of mortal mould
Bring them forth, nor shall oblivion lull to lonely
Slumber. Great in these is God, and grows not old.¹

We feel this conception to be magnificent, and in its own place so it is. It brings with it a kind of mountain air, which helps us, as it helped Antigone, to remember that local and transitory by-laws are not the only guide to the conduct of life, and that it may be right to disobey them when they conflict capriciously with other laws which we see to be permanent and universal. But if we look further we shall find that this view of the Eternal is not wholly satisfying: with the Sophoclean mountain air it brings also plenty of the dust of common life. Not only every general law, but every trivial event has this kind of eternity. The fact of the General Election of 1918 is now an eternal truth, and the fact of my having recorded a vote, and the further fact that my vote was ineffectual. And these truths may be interesting or important to me for some time, or even so long as I exist; but certainly no longer. About every person and every thing there are innumerable eternal truths, but if 'eternal' were limited to this meaning it would not tell us that any person or thing was eternal.

¹ Swinburne's version, in *Athens*.

Yet the word is felt to be an interesting and a significant 'one, too interesting and too significant to be redeemable by any mere paper coinage. The poet who uses it does so at his peril: he must be sure of what he is offering—it must be either an image of his belief or a light of his vision. As an example of the latter I have already quoted two lines from Shelley's *Adonais*: there are many more in the same poem which aim at setting forth a definite theory of immortality, and the poet is so full of it that he takes the best part of seventeen stanzas to express himself. First, Adonais is not dead. 'He hath awakened from the dream of life.' *We* are decaying: *he* lives and wakes. But how? 'He is made one with Nature. . . . He is a portion of the loveliness which once he made more lovely.' This again is more fully set forth:

The splendours of the firmament of Time
May be eclipsed but are extinguished not:
Like stars to their appointed heights they climb,
And death is a low mist which cannot blot
The brightness it may veil. When lofty thought
Lifts a young heart above its mortal lair
And love and life contend in it for what
Shall be its earthly doom, the dead live there
And move like winds of light on dark and stormy air.

This, we are told, is how other poets have attained dazzling immortality. Adonais has now become as them, and we too have but to die if we would be with that which we do seek. 'Follow where all is fled!' The Universal Light and Beauty, the Benediction which the eclipsing curse of birth cannot quench, will consume the clouds of cold mortality and bring us to the abode where the Eternal are.

In this famous passage there seem to be two ideas, one of which is already familiar to us, while the other is newer to English poetry. The first is a version of the old lament in exile: at birth we pass under a curse, we come into a place of dream and stormy visions, a strife and a mad trance, a shadow which we must outgrow again. Death sets us free: also like a low mist it hides from earth the higher course of those who rise like stars in the firmament of Time. But Shelley does not stop there—he goes on to answer the further question of the nature of this continued existence. In spite of the phrases 'he hath awakened', 'he lives and wakes', in spite of the glowing picture of the poets who died young, rising from their thrones to welcome Adonais, it is clear that the immortality assigned to the dead is one not of personal continuance but of transfused existence. Adonais has become an influence, part of Heaven's light,

part of the one Spirit's plastic stress, which sweeps through the dull, dense world and uplifts young hearts in moments of lofty thought.

All this is expressed with so much beauty and sincerity that we cannot reproduce it in any prose analysis; and that implies that there was in Shelley's intuition something beyond the scientific equivalent of his words. Even so the stanzas are apt to lose their hold, to seem less adequate on a later reading than they appeared in the discovery of youth. In the mind of some critical reader they may even minister to the mood of that ironical letter of Andrew Lang's to a Dead Author, in which he imagines a philosophic auction where the buyer is offered 'a distinguished position in the Choir Invisible, but not, of course, a personal immortality'. Such a position, I think, will never satisfy either the sceptic or the man of faith. To the latter it will be a mockery, a form of words, what I have called a piece of paper currency with no real value corresponding to that upon its face. To the sceptic it will be a superfluity. A philosopher like Mr. F. H. Bradley, fervently scientific, but of a reticent and considerate temper, one who would keep silence on the question of a future life until the subject was forced before him, and then speak sadly of its improbability, would never attempt to replace the lost hope by a substitute quite different in essence. If he tells us that 'Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, but to find these reasons is no less an instinct',¹ he is justifying a kind of faith, and not a kind of fraud. But the Choir Invisible will always appear a kind of fraud to those who ask for an eternal life. On this line Poetry has failed to irradiate Philosophy: the current has passed powerfully enough, but not along a well-selected filament.

Yet there is, I believe, at least one thread of Philosophy through which a poetic force may some day flow to give us light. There is a third meaning of Eternity, in which it is used of the timelessness of existences, and Dr. McTaggart has drawn from it a filament of thought, of which I will endeavour to trace the convolutions. To begin with, there has long been a theory which 'holds that all existence is really timeless, and that the *prima facie* appearance of Time which our experience presents is in reality only an appearance which disguises the nature of the timeless reality'. In this case all existence will be eternal, though some, or even all of it, may appear to us as temporal. This doctrine, that all reality is timeless, was held by Kant, by Schopenhauer, by Hegel, and is now accepted by Dr. McTaggart. It has been accepted also, and transmuted, by some

¹ *Appearance and Reality.*

of our poets, as we have already seen. We are exiles, they tell us, and make our pilgrimage in a strange twilight of illusion.

In every land thy feet may tread
Time like a veil is round thy head:
Only the land thou seekst with me
Never hath been nor yet shall be.¹

The question then arises, what relation does Time bear to Eternity on such a theory as this? And the answer is, the relation of illusion to vision, of an inadequate view of reality to an adequate view. But here the philosopher himself propounds a still more momentous question. 'Is there', he asks, 'any law according to which states in Time, as we pass from earlier states to later ones, tend to become more adequate or less adequate representations of the timeless reality?' In the language of the poets, are we daily coming more nearly in sight of our 'dear lost land of home', or are we like 'the youth that daily further from the East must travel'?

The philosopher, in order to answer this momentous question, stays for a moment to consider the nature of the time series. Events in Time take place in an order—a fixed and irrevocable order. But there is in the mere form of Time itself nothing to determine what this order shall be. Of any two events the nature of Time requires either that they shall be simultaneous or that one shall precede the other. But it gives us no help towards determining which shall be the case. 'What then does determine the order of events in Time, on the supposition that Time is only an illusory way of regarding a timeless reality?' The philosopher believes there is good reason to hold that the order is determined by the adequacy with which the states represent the eternal reality, so that those states come next together which only vary infinitesimally in the degree of their adequacy; and that the whole of the time series shows a steady process of change of adequacy—a change towards greater or less adequacy. If once more we translate this by an image from the poets, we shall say that the order of events in Time depends on the thickening or thinning of the 'earthly haze'—we see them one by one more and more clearly or less and less clearly, as the 'dark reality' in which we live is either a morning or an evening twilight, passing into fuller day or deeper night.

We have now reached the culminating point of our inquiry, and the final question before us is one of the utmost interest and significance. If we here see darkly, as through a dome of many-coloured glass, an earthly haze, a mist or twilight, it is obviously a matter of life and

¹ Song in *Dream-market*.

death for the human spirit to know whether the darkness will lift or deepen, whether the reality will clear or fade. We are assured, by the philosopher whom I have chosen to follow, that there are good reasons for believing that our view of reality is becoming not dimmer but clearer, that the representations of reality presented to us in the time series are becoming—by infinitesimal degrees perhaps, but none the less truly—more and more adequate, and will continue inevitably to do so until we reach the last stage in the series and enter upon the perfect vision which lies beyond Time. We must conceive Eternity as being not in the past, as it were, but in the future. Thus Time runs up to Eternity, and ceases in Eternity.

We have not at this moment time or thought to spend upon the pathway of reasoning by which this conclusion is arrived at, or upon the tracks which radiate from it in many directions. We are concerned with it only as material for poetry; and our first reflection will be that the poets have already in their swift and unaccountable way decided the very question at issue, and decided it in two very different senses. For many of them, as we have seen, life is an exile, and the true account of it that given by the Eastern poet :

‘All that is not One must ever suffer with the wound of absence.’

But while for some, as for Wordsworth and Blake, the Eternal reality lies behind us, before the beginning of Time, and we have come down from our high estate, ‘betrayed’ to mortal life, or overtaken by the eclipsing curse of birth; for others our existence is one of glimpses which lighten our darkness unforgettably, and may end by bringing, if not certainty, at least a growing happiness.

Yet ever and anon a trumpet sounds
From the hill battlements of Eternity,
Those shaken mists a space unsettle, then
Round the half glimpsed turrets wash again.

That is from Francis Thompson, a brave but much tried exile: John Masefield is happier, though not more rich in music.

But when men count
Those hours of life that were a bursting fount
Sparkling the dusty heart with living springs,
There seems a world, beyond our earthly things,
Gated by golden moments, each bright time
Opening to show the City white like lime,
High tower’d and many peopled . . .
But trust the happy moments—what they gave
Makes man less fearful of the certain grave
And gives his work compassion and new eyes:
The days that make us happy make us wise.

I have said that such a philosophic theory as we have been examining will assist our criticism of familiar poems and perhaps lead to a new advance by poets to come. It may be asked what is meant by this: we have found that in our poetry there are already many passages which bear well the light of philosophic criticism, and some of them, like the two just quoted, seem to point in the same direction as our theory itself. No doubt Poetry has often dispensed with Logic; but on the other hand Poetry can embody or express not only the aesthetic but the intellectual activities of the human spirit, and it is impossible that any intellectual activity should be without its effect on the poet who gains experience by it. Poems are the outcome of moods; strong poems or deep poems are generally the outcome of habitual moods or long-seated beliefs. The poet whose philosophy is clearly and firmly his own will be the better able to give his poems the outline which will magically influence the world of feeling; for in poetry, as in painting, outline affects many men at least as powerfully as colour affects others. If such a poet, though believing in the existence of evil, and profoundly regretting the darkness of human life and the hardness of those 'thoroughfares of stones' which we have to tread in our pilgrimage, if such a poet were intellectually convinced that whatever the state of the Universe now, it must inevitably improve, and the state of each conscious individual in it must inevitably improve, until they reached a final state of perfect goodness, or at least of very great goodness—a vision of reality now obscured by the illusion of Time—surely his poetry would have the power to give, as only poetry can give, consolation and encouragement in the evils of the present. In saying this I am only repeating, *mutatis mutandis*, the claim of our philosopher himself for his philosophy. He regards the future optimistically, as he says, because he regards it as 'the progressive manifestation of the Eternal'.

His service to Poetry will not, I think, end there. Hitherto the poets have been more often and perhaps more convincingly employed in bewailing the miseries of exile than in exploring the way by which we may come through Time to the land of our desire. Those of them who have sung the song of hope have looked forward to the end and passed over the steps between with one burst of exquisite music or of defiant endurance.

Whilst my soul, like quiet palmer,
Travelleth towards the land of heaven,
Over the silver mountains
Where spring the nectar fountains,
There will I kiss
The bowls of bliss

And drink mine everlasting fill
 Upon every milken hill.
 My soul will be a-dry before,
 But after it will thirst no more.

Raleigh's vision of the end has silvered even the stony wilderness into Delectable Mountains, as with a spiritual moonlight; but moonlight is an uncertain guide for travellers. Patmore's courage almost outdoes him:

Beautiful habitations, auras of delight!
 Who shall bewail the crags and bitter foam
 And angry sword blades flashing left and right,
 Which guard yon glittering height
 That none thereby may come?—
 I mind me still
 I did respire the lonely auras sweet,
 I did the blest abodes behold, and at the mountains' feet
 Bathed in the holy stream of Hermon's thymy hill.

I am not suggesting that poetry better than that of which we have been reminding ourselves is to be desired or looked for in the future: I am speaking hopefully of a new poetry, new in a way which is hard to indicate. No one, without creating poetry upon the instant, could imagine what this poetry will be like when it comes. We can only say of it that it will help us not so much to lament Time as to forget it, and to think of Eternity, not as an infinitely distant and uncertain inheritance, but as a land to be gradually reclaimed from the wilderness by our own labour and virtue, it may be even now in the time of this mortal life, it may be in another day than this. What the form, or even the ostensible subject of this poetry will be, we cannot even conjecture: it will lead us no doubt, as we have been led heretofore, by secrets whispered or murmured, by scarcely perceived attuning chords, by glancing lights and unsuspected byways, by messages half heard and never consciously understood. But they will bring us on our way.

'From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to Thee.'

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